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The situation in the Middle East

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Letter dated 2 October 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I would like to update you on the tragic events that have taken place in recent days in Jerusalem and in the West Bank and Gaza.

The events in these areas represent the latest and most severe developments in a wave of violence that has been building over the past few weeks. The attacks began with the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails in the vicinity of the Netzarim Junction on 13 September. This was followed by the killing of an Israeli soldier by a roadside bomb on 27 September, and the murder of an Israeli police officer by a Palestinian policeman in a joint patrol on 29 September.

The events of this past Friday on the Temple Mount represent a further escalation of the Palestinian violence. Muslim worshippers, out of a desire to violently confront both Israeli police and civilians on the eve of the Jewish New Year, hurled rocks and other objects at Jewish worshippers gathered at the Western Wall below. Israeli police attempted to turn back the protesters through non-violent means, but the mob persisted, attempting to force its way out of the Temple Mount area and through the Mughrabim gate to the Western Wall plaza. At this point, Israeli forces, who had been deployed outside the perimeter of the Mount, were compelled to enter the area to push back the charging mob. The stone-throwing mob continued in its violence for a period of more than four hours.

Regrettably, the wave of Palestinian violence did not stop there. During the last 24 hours alone, there have been over 30 incidents of unprovoked live gunfire directed against Israeli civilians and security forces. One Israeli civilian was shot and killed at close range when dropping his car off at a Palestinian-owned garage in the village of Maskheh. A soldier was killed, and a civilian moderately wounded, in a shooting near the town of Beit Sahour. Two Israeli policemen were wounded in gunfire from armed Palestinian security forces near Jericho and Palestinian attackers opened fire on a school bus near Shiloh.

Meanwhile, the mob violence continues unabated. Let there be no doubt, we are not faced with peaceful demonstrators. There have been numerous instances of

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live fire emanating from within protesting crowds, in a fatal phenomenon encountered throughout the Palestinian Authority territories.

Let me stress that in all the cases mentioned above, Israeli security personnel returned fire only when absolutely necessary and when faced with an imminent threat to life and limb. Israeli forces exercised all possible restraint in their efforts to restore calm and security, and only took action as a last resort, in order to protect the lives of civilians, police officers and Israeli soldiers, as any government would be obligated to do.

We must stress that the responsibility for this distressing escalation lies squarely with the Palestinian Authority, not only due to its failure to take action to halt these events, but also for its incitement of the population through inflammatory rhetoric and calls to violence. Furthermore, Palestinian Authority policemen and security forces have taken an active role in the events, including the use of live ammunition against Israelis.

Most disturbing for Israel is the wholesale violation of signed agreements regarding the use of weapons by Palestinian policemen and paramilitary groups such as the Tanzim group of Arafat's own Fatah faction. The Palestinians have turned these weapons against the same Israeli soldiers with whom they were meant to carry out joint security tasks.

It is regrettable that at such a sensitive time in the Middle East peace process, the Palestinians have once again decided to resort to violence for political gain. Experience has repeatedly shown that the Palestinian Authority's willingness to incite popular violence as a means to elicit concessions in the negotiations serves only to divert the peace process from its course and to hinder our ability to arrive at a final settlement.

We call upon the Palestinian leadership to do its utmost to calm the situation and to create a climate conducive to the advancement of peace negotiations. Specifically, we call upon the Palestinian Authority to act responsibly, and to put an immediate halt to the unrestrained use of gunfire by Palestinian police, to collect the illegal weapons in the hands of the Tanzim, and to distance Palestinian protesters from Israeli positions, as is their obligation under our agreements.

I must reiterate that Israel, for its part, remains committed to achieving a peace settlement with our Palestinian neighbours, even in the face of such violence. We call upon Chairman Arafat to cease the incitement and bloodshed and to return to the negotiating table in earnest. For our part, we will continue the search for peace with the same determination that we use today to confront the violence and restore security.

In closing, I would like to express my sorrow at this tragic loss of life. It is precisely this human suffering that our peace efforts are meant to eliminate.

I would be grateful if you would have the text of this letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 40, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Yehuda **Lancry**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations